

The Association of Electoral Administrators



AEA feedback on Duplicate Registrations

At the Cabinet Office Practitioner Panel meeting on 1 December 2016, the AEA and electoral administrators on the panel were asked to help the Cabinet Office with their initial research on "Duplicate Registrations".

Following on from the meeting, all AEA branches were contacted requesting that they ask the following questions at their next AEA branch meeting for members to discuss:

- **Definitions of what a duplicate actually is?**
- **How do EMS's use functionality for duplicates?**

Below are the responses received from the various AEA branches so far:

North East and Yorkshire branch – 02/12/2016

Definitions of what a duplicate actually is?

- Repeated application
- Peter C Stanyon and Peter Stanyon
- Bringing in changes to an absent vote arrangement and reregistering

How do EMS's use functionality for duplicates?

- All do manually and look at council tax records – very resource intensive

East Midlands branch – 07/12/2016

Lee asked the meeting for views on the definition of 'duplicates' and asked how would we define it and how are we handling them? Comments were as follows:-

- Submission of a repeat registration
- Submitting a new form to make a simple change
- People believing they need to register for specific elections
- In cases where a person has not given a previous address, the website should request a reason to help reduce duplicates across authorities.

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- Duplicates could also be pending electors
- The HEF wording encourages all people to register regardless of whether or not they already are
- Would like to see prevention rather than cure. Publications need to be explicit about who needs to register and who does not

South West branch – 07/12/2016

A duplicate can be:

- Someone already registered who makes a new application at the same address
- A pending elector who receives a paper ITR but then registers online
- Someone who registers at a property with a name similar to a registered elector and we cannot determine if it is the same person or not e.g. Michael Edward Jones and Mike E Jones – could be father and son.

The general feeling was that BAU duplicates are manageable and in general they are checked and sorted reasonably easily. The problems occurred at the referendum when large numbers of people who were already registered made new online applications with different absent vote preferences or slightly different names – the quantity of these at the time became unmanageable.

London branch – 09/12/2016

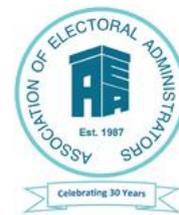
Definitions of what a duplicate actually is?

- An application made by a person already entered on the register at that property or has already made an application to register
- Same information twice, same information twice

How do EMS's use functionality for duplicates?

- Whilst it appears only one EMS system has a duplicate process functionality the majority only used it if it was an exact match (100%) and therefore administrators manually check other records such as council tax whilst processing duplications which is resource intensive
- The generally feeling was that members did not want the EMS system to automate duplicate processing which could disenfranchise someone

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- Members felt that there needs to be clear sign posting on the register to vote website – electors have too many options and no signposting for postal vote applications, opt out, change of name etc.
- Members felt that the duplicate issue increased due to the national media and national messaging which encouraged people to register on line even if they were registered as the messaging did not mention receiving a poll card meant they were registered

West Midlands Branch meeting and the West Mercia Administrators meeting

Discussions were along the same issues as at MERP.

There have been issues with duplicates:

- Regarding those that were on the original IER confirmation run
- Problems with those that had a family member with the same name
- People applying more than once

They didn't really come up with a definition but were happy to say that duplicates were when someone 'matches' because they have applied more than once or have applied after being originally confirmed. They were keen to point out that these may be the real duplicates but all needed to be checked.

There was agreement that there should be something in place that when they registered (or tried to) that told them that there was someone registered with that name. This could be either automated or as part of a look up tool.

It was also thought useful for EROs to keep the date of birth for verification of possible duplicates in the future.

South East Branch Meeting – 5 December 2016

Definitions of what a duplicate actually is?

- People with the same name at the same address e.g. father and sons with the same first name, these are merged together and you can't always tell from Council Tax there are two people there with the same name. This can also mean that postal votes can be allocated to the wrong person due to similar names.
- ITR's sent out, then the person goes online, so two entries.

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- People who are already registered go on line again and register again at election time as worried not registered causing duplicates. EMS need to develop functionality to help with this.

How do EMS's use functionality for duplicates?

- Address checking systems are not very good.
- Automated systems sometimes cause more duplicates, most elections team have to deal with duplicates manually due to this.
- System does not recognise overseas elector duplicates e.g. if overseas electors move back and register normally it does not pick up the overseas entry meaning they are registered twice once as a normal elector and again as an overseas.
- xxxx Council have developed a report to find duplicates far easier than the EMS system reports see comments from xxxx below.

Individual member responses forwarded via AEA branches

- **Individual response**

Definitions of what a duplicate actually is? – a response to an invitation to register be it on-line or via paper form which once processed and received back from DWP is classed as a duplicate. Which technically it isn't it is a response to our letters. Many duplicates are on-line applications an elector makes, sometime several times if they alter their name or make a mistake the first time. Duplicates can sometimes be same name but are actually a senior or junior at the address and more often than not one gets deleted. Overseas electors apply at qualifying address as well as overseas. These do not get picked up always. Some are simply a similar name in the register not even the same address???

How do EMS's use functionality for duplicates? – every application is checked individually out of the work queue, synchronised if correct. Often hundreds downloaded to go through, very time consuming as once agreed they are duplicate the application then goes into another queue 'green' to be processed individually once again. Doubling workload unnecessarily

- **Individual response**

Our definition of a duplicate is one that shares the same or similar names and also details, such as email address.

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Periodically we will run a report which highlights possible duplicate electors.

- **Individual response**

We would define duplicates as:

- i) Any new application when someone is already registered
- ii) More than one application made within a very short space of time

- **Individual response**

Duplicates are usually highlighted as people with the same name at the same or different addresses.

An issue for us has been if we have an elector confirmed on the register, and a new elector with the same name registers online at the address, our system will allow automatic merging, even though they might be, for example, father and son (we might not have a date of birth for the older record, but this would not stop the automatic merge with a new record which has a date of birth if the name is entered exactly the same at the address). This means there is a risk with using the automatic merge function, but, like everyone else, the volume of duplicates can be overwhelming at times, meaning we don't always have time to look at all the records individually.

We've just remembered also that other electors are not included in the duplicates, which can cause issue.

- **Individual response**

My definition of a duplicate application is an application which is from the same person we already have registered as an elector on the register or when a person completes more than one online application which many people did, (in fact some completed 4 online applications!) in the lead up to the Referendum especially when the deadline was extended. I don't consider applications to be duplicates when we've identified a new elector and entered the name as a pending elector so we can send an ITR and they then go online and complete an application.

Our EMS does occasionally mismatch 'duplicates' with the wrong elector so we process each duplicate individually and merge when appropriate. We query any anomalies.

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- **Individual response**

Definitions of what a duplicate actually is? Our Definition of a duplicate is someone who is already fully registered or Pending Additions

How do EMS's use functionality for duplicates? Our EMS flags the current status of all online applications and will match to the details if they are already on the system. We can then look at each application and their current status and if they are registered on pending additions we match them as unnecessary. The only problem is as was mentioned at the meeting were father/son, mother/daughter have the same name without the Date of Births it is easy to miss these and assume they are a duplicate.

- **Individual response**

Here are my views on the duplicate applications.

Definition of a duplicate application – there's 3 basic types:

- a) An elector already registered to vote and does another application for no reason
- b) An elector already registered to vote but does another full application to only change a specific detail about their existing registration e.g. to request a postal/proxy vote form, opt out of the open register or do a change of name.
- c) Multiple applications done by the same elector who isn't registered to vote yet.

In the run up to the EU Referendum we had nearly 4,000 duplicate applications of which the vast majority were the type a) variety - already registered and did another application for no reason. The next most common were type b) – already registered but did another application to change a detail or get a postal vote. The least common was the final type c) multiple applications from electors who weren't already registered.

I believe both type a) and type b) duplicates were caused by poor communication from government and the Electoral Commission. People thought they had to re-register for the EU Referendum as a result of the Government leaflet that was sent out and various social media posts incorrectly telling people to re-register. The IERDs online system also forced electors to do a new application just to get a postal vote form.

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- **Individual response**

Definitions of what a duplicate actually is?

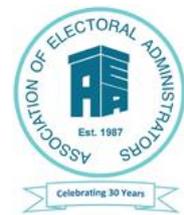
A duplicate is where:

- An application is submitted by a person who is already on the register either as a pending or registered elector either at the same address as the new application or at another address on the same street;
- An entry is made for a name added to a Household Enquiry Form completed via the online submission system where that person has already completed an application to register / became known to Electoral Services prior to data being sent to printers for the production of the HEFs;
- An entry is made for a name added to a Household Enquiry Form completed by a Visiting Officer via Mobile Canvasser (a mobile application used through tablets) where that person has already completed an application to register / became known to Electoral Services prior to data being synchronised between the EMS and the device of the Visiting Officer;
- An entry is made on the register for a pending elector through data mining with the name already either register or pending elector on the same street at another property.

How do EMS's use functionality for duplicates?

- Every time the system is Synchronised with IER-GDS the system looks for any instances as listed above (after it completes the upload / download process of applications);
- Any instances found to match the above criteria (in addition to other more sophisticated algorithms ran in the background which look at dates of births where available, previous names, reversed names etc.) are then slotted into a work queue entitled "Duplicates";
- The system then allows for a report to be produced where it believes a match is extremely likely to be a perfect one with this report then to be examined and the entries listed prior to being Auto Matched (dealt with) through a single click;

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- Where the system is not satisfied that a match is extremely likely but still feels is highly possible these are then dealt with manually on an individual basis to allow for further examination to ensure that a match is actually in place.

January 2017